

BY ALICE CALHOUN HAINES.

"Now, see here," said the Dragon, "are you going to betray me?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Molly, clutching her dolly nervously. "I—I don't think mama 'd like it if she knew you were here."

"That 's just the point," the Dragon answered; "of course she would n't. No lady would; and yet, what harm have I done or what harm do I do? It's the only home I've got."

"But it 's our garden," Molly said; "and we like to walk in it."

"Well," answered the Dragon, "I don't mind. You may walk in it all you please, and I 'll never say a word. I 've been here a month already, and nobody 's ever guessed it. You would n't know it now, but that I told you; and I would n't have told you only that I hated to see you crying so hard about your doll



"'I 'VE GOT A TENDER HEART,' GRUMBLED THE DRAGON."

when I could give it back to you just as easy sure. I thought the dragons were all dead, as not." too."

"Yes," said Molly, "it was very good of you." She hugged Arabella, her favorite wax beauty, closer to her heart. "Oh, Bella," she whispered, "what an adventure you've had! Tumbling into the dried-up well, and spending all this time with a dragon! Goodness, child, I don't see how you ever lived through it! But it *was* good of him to give you back."

"You know," the Dragon continued, "if the Prince should find out my hiding-place it would settle things pretty thoroughly for me. I've almost forgotten how to fight. Anyhow, dragons never *do* beat the princes; you must know that, if you know anything."

"But there is n't any prince," said Molly.

"You don't say!"—the Dragon raised himself high on his hind legs and peered out at her—"you don't say so!" His head was thrust far out of the well now, and Molly drew back in terror. He was a very dreadful-looking beast; but there was also something quite familiar about his appearance. For a moment this puzzled her; but then she saw it was his likeness to a picture in her new fairy-book that caused the feeling.

"Don't be afraid," he said, when he saw her shrink away; "I won't hurt you. But do you really mean to tell me that there is n't any prince at all?"

"Why, yes," Molly answered

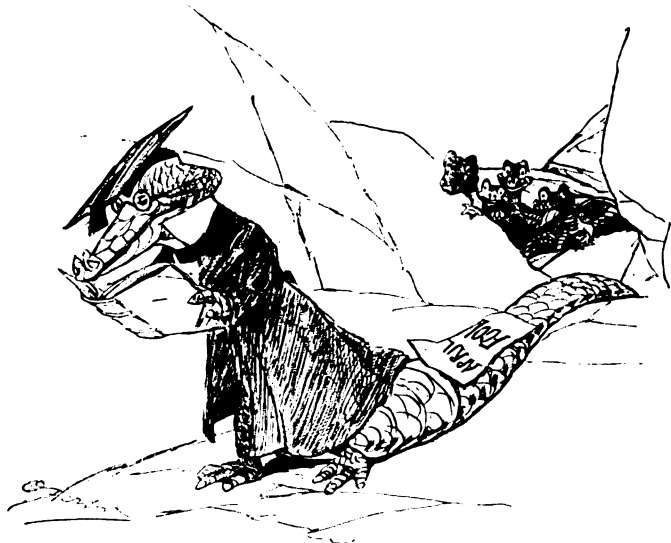
faintly; "they all died long ago. At least, "Now, see here," said the Dragon, "I'll tell you the story, if you will promise not to



A NEEDLESS ALARM.

had n't been for the old fairy Merenthusa I should n't be here either. It's a queer story—" he shook his head sadly.

"Oh, tell it," cried Molly—she was a little girl who dearly loved to listen to stories.



"WE HAD A PRIVATE TUTOR, AND THAT WAS FUN, TOO."

tell your folks about my being here. Come, now — is it a bargain?"

Molly considered for a few moments.

"I'd love to hear the story," she said, "but just think how dreadful it would be if mama or papa were walking alone in the garden, and you should snap off one of their feet."

"I would n't," the Dragon answered; "I

would n't like to eat you a bit, but it would be my duty, you know, if you were a princess."

"Would it? How dreadful!" Molly's little face grew quite white with horror.

"You need n't think I'd enjoy it," said the Dragon, "for I never did one bit. I want to whisper to you. It's a terrible thing I have to say, and I'd rather not speak it aloud."

"There's nobody near," Molly objected; "there is n't a soul in the garden but just you and me. I—I'd rather not put my ear down. Can't you say it without that?"

"Well, if I must, I must," grumbled the Dragon. "I did not think you were so suspicious; but nobody trusts me. I'm beginning to get used to it; and yet all the time, you know, *I've got a tender heart.*" He patted his chest with his paw as he spoke. "Yes; I've got a tender heart."

"I'm very glad to hear it," said Molly, cheerfully. "It's a nice thing to have."

"Not for a dragon, my dear," the monster answered; "you're all off there. On the contrary, it's a drawback, a most terrible drawback!"

"Why, I don't see that," Molly cried.

"My mama says that



"A SIGHT THAT WOULD MAKE MOST DRAGONS LEAP FOR JOY WOULD JUST MAKE ME CRY."

never eat anybody but just princesses. I say, you are n't a princess, are you?"

"Oh, no!" cried Molly, hastily, "indeed, I'm not. I'm just a little girl — Molly Forster."

"I'm glad of that," he assured her; "I

there is nothing so bad as a hard heart. You can cure other things, you know, but you can't cure that. If you are really hard-hearted you have just got to stay so. Why, I believe it's the very worst fault there is."

"For a little girl, I'll admit, or for a princess; but not for us. It's what we all aspire after, and most of us have it. I never did." He sighed deeply. "That's one of the particular features of my story. Shall I tell it to you?"

"Yes, indeed," cried Molly.

"Well," said the Dragon, "there were seven of us, and we lived in a cave in the mountains. It was a big cave with lots of cracks and crevices and crannies to play hide-and-seek in, and my!—but we had a good time! Our father died when we were babies, and our mother let us do just whatever we chose. She was the most indulgent parent that dragon ever had; and yet *she* did n't have a tender heart. She could eat a princess wit' all the gusto in the world; and that is the thing I never did manage. Oh! h-m-m! It has embittered my whole life; however, I'm not up to that yet.

"As I said, we had a glorious time up there in our old cave in the mountains. We never went away to school—our mother could n't part with us—so we had a private tutor, and that was fun, too. My!—we led him a life! The jokes we played on that poor old fellow would make you split your sides laughing; but I have n't time to tell about them now. I remember one morning in particular—but never mind; I guess I won't tell you that."

"Oh, please do," cried Molly; "I love to hear about naughtinesses."

"No," said the Dragon, "I don't think it would be strictly honorable. You see I'm here in your mother's garden, enjoying her hospitality,—her guest you might almost say,—so I must be doubly careful, and tell you only those stories that she would care for you to hear—stories that have a moral."

"I don't like that kind," pouted Molly.

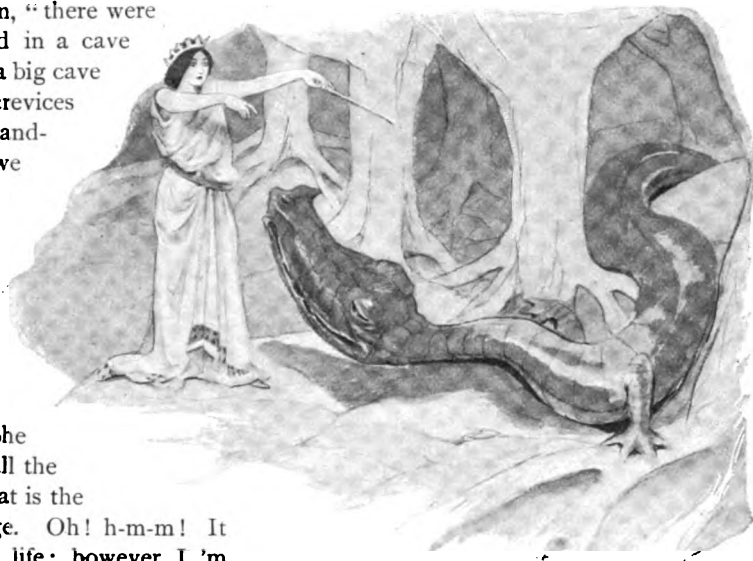
"Well, you ought to," said the Dragon; "that's all that concerns me. Shall I go on?"

Molly thought a moment. "What is the moral of this one?" she asked.

"Never be tender-hearted," the Dragon answered. "It's the best one I know."

"Oh," cried Molly, "why, that's not a moral at all!"

"You wait and see if it's not," said the



"SHE RAISED HER WAND AND THAT IS ALL I CAN REMEMBER."

Dragon, with much confidence. "I think I am the best judge of that."

"Go on," Molly whispered. She felt that she was a very naughty little girl, but she had not time to grieve over the matter just then.

"Well," said the Dragon, "one by one my brothers left the old cave, till at last I alone was left. I had always been delicate, and then, too, I was the baby, so my mother naturally hated to part with me. But when I was about five years old I grew impatient of that quiet life, and determined that it was time for me also to go forth to seek my fortune.

"My mother felt very sad when I told her what was in my mind. 'My dear child,' she said, 'it is what I have been dreading for a long time, but if you feel that you cannot be happy here any longer, why, of course, I can't keep you. Nothing would induce me to make one of my children unhappy for a single moment.' Now was n't she a good creature?"

"Indeed she was," said Molly.

"Next morning I started upon my travels. I shall never forget how strange everything seemed to me, secluded as I had always been in my happy home among the rocks. I remember well seeing my first man — my heart leaped within me, for I had never seen anything like

poor fellow's face and heard his breath coming in quick, panting gasps, it gave me such a queer, sick sort of feeling that I stopped running and the man got away.

"At first I could not imagine what was the cause of my weakness, but the meaning flashed



"'I WAS TENDER-HEARTED! I STOPPED RUNNING AND THE MAN GOT AWAY.'"

him before, and 't was only by hearsay that I knew what he was. Of course, the correct thing was to chase him; all my brothers had told me that, so I began at once. I never thought that I should mind. My brothers all enjoyed it, and I expected to also; but when I saw the horror depicted upon the

upon me all of a sudden. I was tender-hearted! The conviction forced itself upon me and nearly drove me mad."

"Poor Dragon!" said Molly; and then she thought, "Oh, what a bad, bad little girl I am, to be sorry because he did not eat the man! I did n't think I could be so wicked!"

"Yes," said the dragon, "that was how I first knew it, and from that day to this I have never known a happy moment! It's been the same way with everything I've undertaken; I'd go out in the woods and see a lovely princess tied to a tree, a sight that would make most dragons leap for joy, and it would just make me cry! I could not help it, somehow, the tears would come.

"I'd say over and over to myself, 'You're a dragon. You're a dragon. It's your duty to eat her. She won't mind. Princesses never do. It's what they're made for.' But try as I would I could not bring myself to do it. I'd go away and hide in a cave till some one had untied her, and sometimes I'd overhear remarks like this: 'They say there is a dragon around here, and, do you know, the Princess Rose, or Belinda, was tied to this tree for three whole days and he never came near her. I would n't give much for a beast like that!' Oh, it was most humiliating, and the older I grew the worse it was.

"At last one day things came to a crisis. I was walking in the forest when suddenly I came upon three beautiful maidens, all in a row, tied to sycamore trees. I just turned about and ran! I'm sorry to confess it, but it's true. I scuttled over the ground as fast as I could crawl, slipping under the brushwood and whisking around the tree-trunks, till suddenly I stopped spell-bound, for there — right in front of me — was another of them! I just stood still and looked at her, my eyes almost bulging out of my head!

"'So this is the way you bear yourself, oh, valiant one!' she cried, her voice full of fury. 'This is the way you devour princesses, oh, ranger of the woods! Very pretty conduct; very pretty, indeed!'

"'Good gracious!' I gasped, 'do you want me to eat you?' I had never expected this. 'Let others scoff as they will,' I always thought, 'at least I have the sympathy of the princesses.'

"'Look at me,' she commanded; and then I understood. She was not a woman at all, but a fairy. I knew her at once by her eyes; they

were pale green and twinkled like stars. Her name was Merenthusa, and she was both wicked and powerful.

"'They were my step-daughters,' she said, 'and I tied them to the trees this morning. I knew that there was a dragon near and I wanted to get rid of them. Then I tied myself to this tree, intending to make myself invisible when you passed, and so escape unharmed. When my husband returned he should find me here weeping and wailing over the fate of his three lovely daughters. I should have told him that you were frightened away before you had eaten me. That would have been true, at all events.'

"'No, it would n't,' I cried, and I jumped at her; and, do you know, I really believe I should have eaten her, but she raised her wand, and — that is all I can remember.

"I think she must have put me into a magic sleep, in which I lay for years and years, for about two months ago I woke and found myself in what used to be the forest — it is only a patch of woods now; a great thicket had grown up around me, and I suppose that is how I had escaped detection.

"When I scrambled from it everything seemed changed; nothing was as it used to be, and I felt lost and strange. I traveled a great many miles, always during the night, and hid in the day time, and after a while I made my way into your garden, found this old well, and here I have been ever since. That's my story. Now remember, you promised not to tell."

"Molly! Molly! Molly!" It was her mother's voice calling.

The little girl started up from the ground, where she had been sitting, and ran toward the house. She felt queer and stiff.

"I don't suppose I can break my word," she whispered, "though mama would love to hear about him. Oh, I wish to-morrow would hurry up and come. I am going to get him to tell me a new story every day."

But, strange to say, next morning when Molly sought her friend the dragon in the garden he was nowhere to be found, and the little girl never saw nor heard of him again.